

# Doing Things Right...Or...

-- Al E. Bavry, CEO, Kimal Lumber & Hardware  
March 22, 2017



Some time ago, I was reading an article on some of the tenants of BMP..."Best Management Practices." The author talked about "Doing Things Right," or "Doing the Right Thing"!! It sounded confusing, but as I read further, "I got it!"

First, without question, if you're running a good business, you have many things in place to make it work...Good Systems, procedures, protocol, all. When these are written down, designed and implemented correctly, the results generally are what a well-run business should look like. Kind of: "Plan your work, then work your plan."...That's BMP...So good so far. That's "Doing Things Right."

Now we get to the more elusive, "Doing the Right Thing." Here's a recent true story. The type that I'm sure we all can relate to...and it's a fitting example of how "Doing the Right Thing" is way different from "Doing Things Right." At Kimal, we had a pretty complicated "Special Order" go through that was one of those orders you *can't return to the vendor under any circumstances...Period!* So, the customer received it, and things went horribly wrong from there. The product simply wouldn't work, and of course the customer wanted to "return it" and re-order the correct item. We patiently pointed out (Remember: Good protocol and systems in place!) how we had gone over the specs with the customer, and reminded them that "You did sign off on it, and paid that S.O. deposit! So, looks like you own it." While this customer acknowledged that he signed off for it, he said he'd relied on us to "Do It Right" since we are the experts, not him.

It's a tough issue to face, sometimes. After all, we are indeed supposed to be the experts, and our customers have come to rely on our expertise. We wouldn't have it any other way, would we? So we dug deeper in this case, and finally figured out that the real "blame" (I hate that word!!) probably started with our own Sales rep. He didn't listen well enough to the customer, and wound up misinterpreting what the customer needed....Bottom line, he screwed up!! And back to the customer...In early "negotiation," he acknowledged that "he did sign off on it" and maybe was somewhat to blame, although once again he reminded us that "We are the experts, and should have gotten it right." So the door was open for us to "eat about half of the problem and the customer the other half." We could have done that. But we did something better.

My recommendation was what I call a best-outcome scenario: That we go back to the customer, tell him, "We appreciate your interest in 'owning' some of this, but this is our 'oops' and so we'll eat it all...re-order the proper item, and move on." Now at the end of all this, I feel what we did was true case of "Doing the Right Thing." Whether or not the customer continues to buy from us, at least he cannot say that we didn't do what was right and proper...Haggling over a pretty large amount and saving several thousand dollars may have made Kimal Look better on our operating statement for the month, but the customer would forever have that "Burr in his Saddle" feeling toward Kimal no matter what. Of course there are cases where it isn't that simple, and times when the customer is truly wrong--no matter what. But you still have to remember, forgetting right or wrong for a moment, "Perception (through the customer's eyes) is everything"!

A footnote...I've learned over the years, that when I've taken this kind of high road, and eaten some big "oops"....The "good press" and positive feelings through the customer's eyes was almost always invaluable..."Kimal did the right thing"!! Hard lesson to learn (or "eat"), but there is a vast difference between "Doing Things Right" ...or..."Doing the Right Thing" ...Good selling and successful conclusions to all.